

People in Tijuana, Mexico, climb a fence along the U.S. border.

The Immigration Debate

About 11 million immigrants live in the U.S. illegally. How to handle them is one of the biggest issues of the 2012 presidential campaign.

Anthony's parents risked their lives to immigrate to the U.S. illegally from Mexico about 16 years ago.

They hoped to find more opportunities for their children and to live "the American Dream."

"My mom wanted a better life for herself," Anthony says. "My dad wanted to find a job."

Anthony, 11, is a U.S. citizen because he was born here. But his

parents are in the U.S. illegally because they never received permission to live here. The sixth-grader from Brooklyn, New York, didn't want his full name used for this story. He's worried that immigration officials might force his parents to leave the country.

Hope for a Better Life

Anthony's parents are among the estimated 11 million illegal immigrants living in the U.S.

today. Most are from Mexico or Central America. Many illegal immigrants have traveled hundreds of miles through the harsh desert to sneak across the border into the U.S.

In their native countries, they often live on a few dollars a day. Illegal immigrants usually come to the U.S. in search of work and a better education for their kids.

How should the U.S. deal with illegal immigrants? That question

Immigration Nation

1607

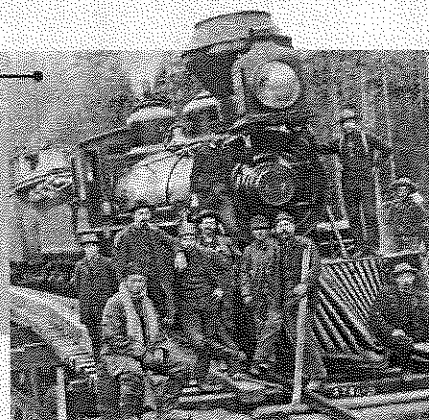
The first permanent English colony in North America is established in Jamestown, Virginia. In 1620, English settlers arrive in Massachusetts seeking religious freedom.

1845-1849

Huge numbers of Irish immigrants come to the U.S. during the Potato Famine. Up to 1 million people die after a fungus kills Ireland's main food source.

1848

The California Gold Rush attracts a huge wave of Chinese immigrants, who later help build the first transcontinental railroad. In 1882, Congress bars Chinese immigration.



is a big issue in this year's presidential election.

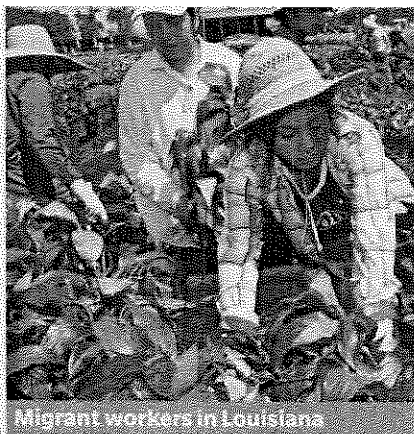
A Heated Debate

The U.S. is often called "a nation of immigrants." Yet since the country's beginnings, Americans have struggled with what to do about newcomers (see *Immigration Nation*). In the 1750s, Benjamin Franklin worried about the many immigrants from Germany coming to the 13 American Colonies.

Today, immigration remains in the spotlight. Within the past two years, Arizona, Utah, Georgia, Indiana, South Carolina, and Alabama have all passed tough immigration laws. These laws seek to identify illegal immigrants and **deport** them.

Supporters of such laws argue that illegal immigrants take jobs away from American workers. They say that this is further weakening the struggling U.S. economy. They also argue that illegal immigrants put a strain on important resources like schools and hospitals.

But the new state laws have also been met with a storm of protests. Critics of the



Migrant workers in Louisiana

laws say Americans don't want the jobs that illegal immigrants take, especially low-paying jobs in farming and construction. In October, a tomato farmer told a reporter that the Alabama law scared off his crew of 64 Hispanic **migrant** workers. Only two U.S. citizens applied for the jobs, leaving most of his crops to rot in the fields.

Path to Citizenship?

The leading candidates for President are also divided over the issue. President Barack

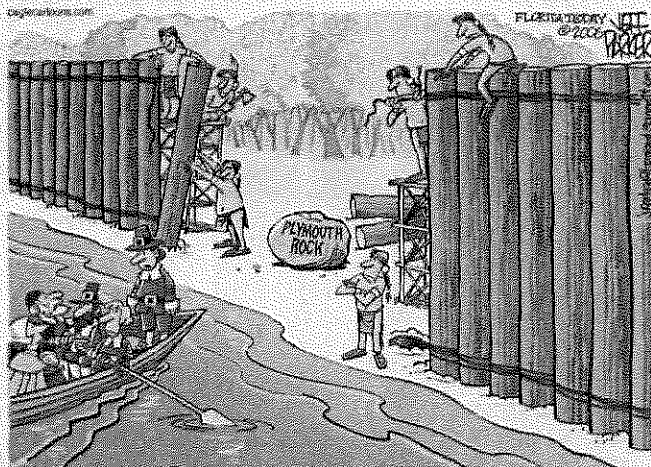
Obama says he supports giving illegal immigrants a "path to citizenship." They would first have to meet certain standards (such as learning English) before one day becoming U.S. citizens.

The Republicans competing to become their party's nominee for President have other ideas. One candidate, Newt Gingrich, proposes that illegal immigrants who have been in the U.S. for 25 years or more should be able to stay legally. Other Republican candidates argue that such plans aren't fair to people who have come to the U.S. legally. They propose that all illegal immigrants return to their birth countries and apply to enter the U.S. legally.

In Brooklyn, Anthony hopes people can see past the arguing and realize that his family isn't so different from others in the U.S.

"At some point," he says, "we were all immigrants to this country."

—Joe Bubar



"THEY SAY THEY'RE BUILDING A WALL BECAUSE TOO MANY OF US ENTER ILLEGALLY AND DON'T LEARN THEIR LANGUAGE OR ASSIMILATE INTO THEIR CULTURE..."

Words to Know

deport (dih-port) *verb*. to send a person back to his or her original country

migrant (mye-gruhnt) *adjective*. describes a person who moves from place to place in search of work

1880-1920

The U.S. sees a huge wave of immigration, mainly from European nations. Millions of newcomers arrive at the immigration station on Ellis Island in New York Harbor.



1990

To try to stop the flow of illegal immigrants, the U.S. begins building a fence along the Mexican border in California. Today, fences stretch about 650 miles along the 1,959-mile border.

Today

The U.S. is more diverse than ever. About 40 million people living here are foreign-born. Each year, hundreds of thousands of immigrants are officially granted U.S. citizenship.

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